

Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) conducts numerous activities which contribute to the ongoing assessment of the rehabilitation needs of South Dakotans who are blind or visually impaired. The Board of SBVI (State Rehabilitation Council) is a partner in the development and implementation of activities that are carried out to assess the rehabilitation needs of South Dakota citizens and to address the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs. The Board also assists SBVI in analyzing the results of the various activities and in addressing methodologies to conduct and implement findings from the comprehensive statewide needs assessment on a triennial basis.

The FY 2007- 2009 assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities and the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs is derived from a variety of sources. These sources summarize identified needs of individuals with disabilities in the state plan. The information obtained from the assessment is reflected in the goals and strategies 4.11(c)(1) and 4.11(d). The sources of this information consist of:

- Consumer satisfaction surveys (conducted annually);
- Survey of Community Rehabilitation Programs (conducted annually);
- Annual public meetings;
- Focus groups meetings with consumers and providers (conducted as needed based on recommendations from the Board of SBVI);
- Case file reviews (conducted annually);
- Conferences and seminars (conducted annually);
- Input from consumer organizations of the blind (ongoing);
- Board and SILC quarterly meetings and strategic planning sessions;
- Training needs assessments for agency staff, Community Rehabilitation Programs, the state's 121 projects and other entities involved in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services (conducted annually), and
- Involvement and participation on boards such as: Statewide Independent Living Council; Work Force Development Council; Career Planning Council; Freedom to Work Leadership Council; Assistive Technology Advisory Committee; and SD School for the Blind Advisory Council (ongoing).

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Summary

The consumer satisfaction survey is used to review and analyze the effectiveness of the public Vocational Rehabilitation Program's consumer's satisfaction with functions performed by the VR Agency, VR services provided by the State VR Agency, and VR services provided to VR consumers. Three separate consumer satisfaction surveys are administered, each made up of six questions. The surveys target the consumers' satisfaction with informed choice, services, and employment outcomes.

Surveys conducted in 2007 and 2008 illustrated that consumers are pleased with the services that they received from SBVI and that they were happy with the level of informed choice that they were offered. Survey results also revealed that out of the three general areas surveyed, consumers were least satisfied with their earnings and benefits that they received at the positions that they obtained with assistance from SBVI. SBVI maintains a focus on improving the quality of successful closures with an emphasis on improving satisfaction with earnings and benefits.

The methodology for the consumer satisfaction survey is being revised for the survey to be conducted in 2009 to address specific priorities identified by the Board of SBVI in conjunction with the Division. The new survey will also assure reliability and validity of the information. A consultant has been retained to assist with analysis of the survey and results obtained.

Case File Review Summary

A case file review was conducted on the SBVI VR program on April 2-3, 2008. The main purpose of the CFR was to determine compliance with federal laws and state policies. Ancillary purposes include determining training needs, identifying best practices, and identifying training needs. SBVI pulled all counselors in to review cases in order to assist in the review and to facilitate a sharing of ideas and techniques among counselors. Follow up after the review will be completed so that each counselor has an opportunity to view the reviews completed on their cases.

Reviewers completed the test cases prior to the review date and the results were shared and discussed at the beginning of the review. 90 cases were randomly selected and reviewed. The number of cases reviewed from each caseload varied depending on the caseload size, the number of cases closed, and the experience of the counselor. The cases were either currently open or were closed cases during Federal Fiscal Year 2007.

The case file review instrument focuses on Eligibility, Development of IPE, VR Services Provided, Case Closure, and Successfully Rehabilitated Closures. In addition, during the review process, the reviewers identified areas of inconsistency and areas of attention that the VR program needs to consider.

Improvement and consistency in performance among counselors are needed in the following areas:

- Correctly entering and documenting all impediments to employment.
- Correct and thorough documentation of the employment goal.
- The identification and use of comparable benefits when they are available.
- Applying financial needs policy when necessary.

For the second straight year, the poor level of participation on the consumers' part was a concern. SBVI will explore options in this area to identify strategies that can be utilized to increase the number of consumers that are actively participating toward an employment goal. In general, eligibilities were completed accurately and correctly reflected the consumers' disabilities and need for services. All services were pre-authorized and provided in a timely manner. SBVI counselors were commended for their efforts in staying in contact with consumers and providing a high level of counseling and guidance.

Case file reviews are also conducted for the SBVI older blind program with input from the Board of SBVI and results reported to the Board and in the SBVI annual report.

Focus Group Summary

SBVI hired an independent contractor to conduct a series of focus groups comprised of former and some current clients of SBVI. The purpose of these focus groups was to:

- Identify individuals' ability to access services from SBVI
- Identify the desired outcomes by the clients and the extent to which those were achieved
- Identify the strengths of the services provided
- Identify the shortcomings of the services provided and solicit suggestions for improvement

The focus groups were held in Rapid City and Sioux Falls in early March, 2007. The opportunity to provide input was offered to current consumers as well as successful closures from the past few years. Eighteen individuals participated

across the four groups. Four focus groups were held in Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

The focus groups identified the following:

- All participants wanted to work.
- Transportation is a major issue.
- All realized the need for assistance from SBVI to gain the independence that they desired.
- The participants recognized the value of appropriate assistive technology.
- There is a lack of knowledge about the support groups available to those with vision loss.
- The participants felt that there is a significant lack of understanding about vision loss on the part of the community and employers.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Improvement

All participants wanted to be able to live life fully. They saw SBVI as the means to make that happen with assistive technology, skills of blindness, and advocating/helping them with transportation. Gaps were seen in all groups with respect to community knowledge about blindness and their own lack of knowledge about support groups.

The participants saw the importance of ongoing training of SBVI staff in both skills associated with blindness and in being good listeners. The skills in blindness centered on increasing staff knowledge in the latest developments in assistive technology.

Public Meetings

Annual public meetings are conducted in order to give consumers and concerned individuals an opportunity to provide input on SBVI's state plan and the services that SBVI offers. The SBVI Board assists by providing input on the public meeting format and locations. Board members also facilitate the public meetings. Members from both the National Federation of the Blind and South Dakota Association of the Blind help promote the public meetings and assist with transportation needs for meeting participants. In addition to discussing the state plan, public meetings offer an opportunity for participants to offer suggestions for services and to address unmet needs in vocational rehabilitation.

Annual public meetings were conducted in April of 2007 at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the blind in conjunction with a quarterly SBVI Board

meeting and in Pierre in coordination with the National Federation of the Blind state convention based on recommendations from the Board of SBVI. In addition a joint public listening session was held in Aberdeen in conjunction with the SILC and Board of Vocational Rehabilitation. In addition to the state plan, topics addressed included:

- Services on Reservations and cooperation between the state's Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Projects and SBVI
- Community Rehabilitation Program needs in western South Dakota for citizens who are blind
- Employer education related to hiring individuals with disabilities
- Transition activities including the Youth Leadership Forum and Transition Week at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind
- Public relations activities
- Consumer organization priorities

Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired

The Board of SBVI meets quarterly, and Board meetings are open to the public with time for public comment. Meeting agendas are distributed prior to the meetings and posted on the SBVI web site. This offers an opportunity for citizens to attend and address the Board regarding their needs and options for services.

The Director of SBVI and other staff attend annual state conventions of the blind (American Council of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind affiliates) on an annual basis to solicit input on the needs of consumers with vision loss. A Division representative attends a national convention of the blind each year to ascertain needs and service options from a national perspective. Attendance is alternated every other year between the two organizations. In addition, costs for attending state conventions are covered for SBVI Board members.

Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment Services

Individuals with significant disabilities make up a large portion of the total population of SBVI individuals served (98% of successful closures were significantly disabled in FY 2007). Because of this, SBVI has made efforts to address services provided to this population by developing strategies and providing specialized services to those that are served.

Training provided to staff in the past year has included specialized training in areas such as low vision, accommodations for individuals who are blind or

visually impaired, and effectively working with people with personality disorders. Needs are assessed based on data analysis to identify disabilities of those served and through input on staff regarding disability specific issues that need to be addressed.

In addition to these measures, SBVI has specialists to address the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities. A deaf-blind specialist provides outreach, assessments can direct services to individuals with dual sensory loss and to provide recommendations to SBVI counselors who work with individuals who are deaf-blind. A transition specialist assesses needs of transition age consumers with significant disabilities and vision loss across the state. SBVI also has a staff person who works with consumers with diabetes to ensure that they are trained in proper low vision diabetic management techniques. These state wide positions serve to not only provide consultation and direct services, but identify the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities

The largest minority group in South Dakota involves American Indians from several tribes, making up approximately 8% (8.3% according to 2000 U.S. Census data) of the state's total population. SBVI has initiated a number of activities to address serving all eligible individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity. In FY 2007, approximately 17% of all SBVI VR closures were minorities, and approximately 15% were Native American or Alaska Native.

Surveys are conducted to identify issues that specifically impact individuals from minority backgrounds who are unserved or underserved. Issues identified include:

- Transportation – lack of public transit on American Indian Reservations requires that Vocational Rehabilitation provide for transportation to access services.
- Communications – Many American Indians do not have access to the internet or even telephones making communication difficult.
- Access to medical services – Indian Health Services are available on Reservations and Tribal lands but these facilities are often understaffed and do not have the latest in medical technology or medical specialists to provide treatment. Vocational Rehabilitation services include transportation and maintenance to urban areas for needed treatment as part of Individual Plans for Employment.
- There are limited job opportunities on the states Reservations leading to challenges for job development and job placement.

SBVI has developed strategies for addressing results of the survey including training for VR counselors in providing options for self-employment for eligible American Indians and collaboration with the 121 projects and the Native American Independent Living Center in South Dakota. Other initiatives resulting from the needs assessment survey involved the provision of more culturally sensitive services for American Indians and other minorities with disabilities.

These are some of the activities to ensure participation of citizens who are blind and from minority backgrounds will continue to be a priority for the Division and Board of SBVI in assess needs of this population. In addition to those of American Indian dissent, we are also experiencing an increased demand for services from individuals of minority backgrounds from a variety of diverse cultures. We will continue to monitor performance data and agency policies and procedures and the impact on service delivery for SD citizens from minority backgrounds who are blind and visually impaired.

Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Unserved or Underserved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program

In addition to the strategies that have been developed to ensure that services are available to minorities, SBVI recognizes that further outreach efforts are needed in order to identify individuals who are unserved or underserved. Goals #3 and #5 on Attachment 4.11(c)(1) and the associated strategies in Attachment 4.11(d) have been designed to address this need. The Board of SBVI has been instrumental in developing strategies to further SBVI's outreach. The comprehensive needs assessment has shown that all too often, consumers of vocational rehabilitation lament that they wish they would have heard of the program sooner. Outreach has been emphasized with vocational rehabilitation counselors as well as other SBVI staff, and this will continue to be a focus of the Division and the Board of SBVI.

The Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Served Through Other Components of the Statewide Workforce Investment System

South Dakota has a comprehensive and coordinated public and private statewide workforce investment system. There is a partnership of agencies and employer resources under the guidance of the South Dakota Workforce Development Council. Public vocational rehabilitation is represented on the State Workforce Council and members are appointed to the state rehabilitation councils. Public vocational rehabilitation analyzes employment trends and labor market demands as an agency represented on the South Dakota Career Council.

A significant need for individuals who are served through the workforce investment system is the coordination of services and funding with the vocational rehabilitation program. Because of this need, the South Dakota public vocational rehabilitation programs and the Department of Labor issued a joint memorandum to the Vocational Rehabilitation offices, One-Stop Career Centers, and the Career Learning Centers. This memorandum addressed the level of services available when funded through the WIA.

The need to establish, develop, or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State

Assessment of the need for establishing, developing or improving community rehabilitation programs has been addressed through analysis of needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities and services available through the state mental health system, developmental disability system and other resources which offer community rehabilitation services. Community rehabilitation programs participate in training needs assessments and are offered training and technical assistance to improve programs and services for vocational rehabilitation consumers.

The community rehabilitation program needs of South Dakotan's that are blind are primarily addressed through services at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC). To better assess these needs, SDRC participates in assessments to determine needs in the community rehabilitation program system and consumers respond to survey questions to address needs of the providers.

The following priorities were identified and will be addressed by SBVI:

- Improve coordination of services for individuals with multiple disabilities;
- Demonstrate outcomes and accountability;
- Increase outreach programs to meet the needs of individuals from minority backgrounds.

Needs assessment activities revealed the following:

- Access to the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind needs to be promoted and supported on a state wide basis;
- Access to specialty services such as orientation and mobility and low vision therapy needs to be addressed in rural areas.

The SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind was forced to relocate due to a decision by the SD Lion's Foundation to sell the building which was built through a partnership between the Foundation and SBVI utilizing establishment grant

funds. The Board of SBVI served an active role in the decisions involved with relocation including accessibility of the site both structurally and recommending that the location be accessible to public transportation. Board members gave input on the needs of citizens for the programs and structure of the environment necessary to assure optimal services.

Other Activities Conducted as part of the Statewide Needs Assessment

2007 RSA Monitoring Review – Data analysis and staff training have focused on priorities identified during the review related to increasing the rehabilitation rate for transition youth by one percent per year over the next three years.

Needs assessment activities include:

- Measuring outcomes of students participating in a variety of programs and activities developed to increase success in employment.
- Participation on SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Task force transition services work group to identify resources for transition age youth.
- SD Department of Education Special Education Survey Results related to transition services and outcomes.

Another priority identified was to narrow the gap between average hourly earnings to a level comparable to the state average hourly wage for consumers of SBVI with employment competitive outcomes. Needs assessment activities related to increased wages:

- Data analysis to evaluate factors that impact wages and outcomes for specific disability populations.
- Department of Labor data and resources to utilize labor market trends to benefit consumers.
- Assess impact of disability and options for education and training for those served making lower wages.
- Benefit analysis and study of impact of wages for Social Security beneficiaries.

Conclusion

Activities involved in the statewide needs assessment are varied yet comprehensive in addressing the rehabilitation needs of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Accessing resources from other entities is critical to identifying and addressing issues related to optimal rehabilitation services and outcomes. Individuals served by SBVI frequently have other disabilities that lead to functional limitations that need to be addressed as part of the rehabilitation process. Information from the Departments of Labor, Education, Human Services, Social Services and Health in South Dakota is vital in identifying needs and addressing those needs based on individual

circumstances. A variety of resources are also available outside of the state government system including advocacy groups, tribal programs and other specialty programs. Utilization of survey information and data is critical to identifying and addressing rehabilitation needs of the state's citizens.

The following table summarizes rehabilitation needs identified through the comprehensive statewide needs assessment and the target populations for whom activities are planned to address needs.

Rehabilitation Needs Identified	Most Significant Disability	WIA	Unserved and Underserved	Minorities
Assistive Technology	X	X	X	X
Culturally Relevant Services	X	X	X	X
Increased Wages	X	X	X	X
Public Awareness	X		X	X
Transition Services	X	X	X	X
Transportation	X		X	X
Benefits Management	X		X	X
CRP Services	X		X	X